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SERMON

BY THE

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PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

IN

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1838.

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To the Venerable the Archdeacon,
The Reverend the Clergy of the Archdeaconry, and the Members of the
Church Society of New Brunswick,
The following Discourse, published at their unanimous request,
Is inscribed with sentiments of sincere regard and esteem by their
affectionate Brother,

THE AUTHOR.

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SERMON.

Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.—1st Thess. 5th Chap. 21st v.

The Holy Scriptures, as founded upon Eternal and Divine truth, are so far from forbidding their Disciples to investigate the evidence by which their claims are supported, that they invite enquiry, nay, they make it the duty of the Christian carefully to examine the testimony which is designed to prove their supernatural origin. On the other hand, Heathen superstition and Mahometan delusion prohibit, under the severest penalties, their abject votaries from the slightest use of their reason in matters of religion, and inculcate upon their followers implicit faith, as well as unhesitating obedience. Based upon error and falsehood, they are naturally afraid to come to the light, lest their deeds should be made manifest that they are deeds of darkness, and that there is no truth in them. Even under the Mosaic dispensation, which was an economy of comparative bondage, the Almighty, nevertheless, with marvellous condescension, appeals to the understanding of the Children of Israel, for the rectitude, the reasonableness, and justice of his ways. Wherefore I will yet plead with you saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. In the original be judged. Ezekiel 17th ch. 20th v., and I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare and I will bring him to Babylon, and I will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. And to mention no more, Ezek. 18th ch. 25th v. Are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal O House of Israel, saith the Lord. Our blessed Lord, early in his Ministry, charged his countrymen to search the Scriptures, for in them says he ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me. John 5th and 39th v. The word translated search, is a metaphorical term, borrowed from those who dig for metals, who ransack the bowels of the earth with great labour, industry and care until they happily find the wished for Treasure. Truth, like

the precious ores, seldom lies near the surface, but must often be elicited by long, patient and deep investigation, and its attainment be the reward of persevering and strenuous efforts. "Our holy religion," says Dr. Barrow, "ordinarily doth "refuse a sudden and precipitate assent, admitting no man "capable of judging and choosing for himself to the participa- "tion of it, or to the name and privileges of a worthy believer, "until after a competent time and opportunities of instruction, "he can approve himself to understand it well, and doth avow "himself to be cordially persuaded of its truth." See Barrows Sermon on Faith.—But, if there were no other text in the sacred volume, the passage taken as the subject of this Discourse would be amply sufficient to substantiate this great truth. I need not inform many who hear me this day, that the original word here rendered to try, denotes that process by which metals are examined by fire, in order that the pure ore may be separated from the dross. Many texts might be brought from the old Testament to prove this, but time will only permit me to cite a very few. Jer. 9th c. 7th v. Therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, behold I will melt them and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of my people. And Prov. 8th c. 10th v. Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold. And 17th c. 3rd v. of the same book, The fining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tryeth the hearts. And in the New Testament, 1st Peter, 1st c. 7th v. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour, although he had the testimony of John the Baptist, and although he spoke as never man spoke, and his captious and prejudiced countrymen could not resist the wisdom with which he addressed them, did nevertheless appeal to miracles as the only rational test of the truth of his divine mission. John 5th c. 36th v. But I (says he) have greater witness than that of John, for the work which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And in the 15th c. 24th v. of the same Evangelist, If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin, viz. the great national sin of rejecting the Messiah. Thus we see that our holy religion, so far from inculcating implicit faith and prostration of the understanding, commands it as a duty, to make the best use of

our reason, and to follow the example of the Bereans, who are styled by the sacred historian as more noble or liberal minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so. This search is incumbent upon all Christians according to their measure, but more particularly upon us, my Reverend Brethren, who are bound to be apt or fit to teach, to be always ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us, and to show ourselves workmen, that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Give me leave upon this occasion to make some observations on the study of Theology, which I should have declined were it not for reasons which I deem imperious at the present juncture. I need hardly inform you that much misconception prevails upon this subject. Many seem to entertain the notion, that the principal business of a Theological Professor is to inculcate the tenets and maintain that system of order and discipline by which his own Church is distinguished from other Christian denominations. Now certainly a Professor of Theology, who should enter upon the discharge of this duty with ideas such as these would understand his duty ill, and it is to be feared would discharge it much worse. It is to be presumed, that those who enter upon a course of Theological studies have passed through much preparatory discipline, that besides a competent knowledge of the Greek and Latin Classics, they have had their reasoning powers so exercised and invigorated by mathematical and logical investigation, that they are able to discriminate between truth and sophistry, and fitted to form a right judgment upon controverted subjects, when the evidence on both sides is fairly laid before them.

There are many subjects of Theology common to all Christians, and which therefore furnish no matter for dispute; such as the evidences of natural and revealed religion, criticism, and interpretation of the Scriptures, or what is usually called the exigetical part of Theology; upon the first and second of these important topics it is needless to make any observations, as on them the student of Divinity can be at no loss as long as the works of Grotius, Butler, Leslie, Campbell, Chalmers and Paley remain, which have justly been called the common stock of Theologians. From the learned labours of Campbell, Michaelis, the Lectures of Bishop Marsh, the Biblical Institutes of Dr. Gerard, and from the most excellent and useful work of Hartwell Horne, the student may derive all the information necessary upon this most interesting part of study usually termed Scriptural Criticism.

On the interpretation of Scripture I shall make a few very brief remarks, as the time will not permit us to enter fully into a question of great extent, as well as of extreme importance. The Philosophy of the Schools, (says a learned and profound writer) sunk, to rise no more, when the true method of science gained its first indisputable triumph; but although the same method is not formally applicable to Theology, yet the principle of it is so. The works of nature and the holy Scriptures proceed from the same fountain of eternal light and truth, and are the two volumes which God has given man to read, as the great Lord Verulam beautifully expresses it. Both must therefore be interpreted and explained by the same method, viz. that of calm and patient induction. "The art of Criti-"cism, and the true logic of interpretation, must restore to "the Church (under that guidance what is never denied when "ingeniously sought,) the pure meaning of the Scripture." I know it is often said that we are to judge of Scripture by the analogy of faith, but this analogy of faith will generally be found to be the peculiar tenets of the respective denominations into which the Christian world is unhappily divided. When this analogy of faith is laid down as a principle, nothing is admitted which is contrary thereto, or may seem by inference to countenance a different doctrine. Thus the Calvinist, according to his analogy of faith, will find Calvanism to be the doctrine of the Scripture, the Arminian, Arminianism; the Arian and the Socinian will find in the Scriptures no proofs of the sacred Trinity, nor the Universalist any such thing as everlasting punishment, strictly so called. Upon this subject Dr. Campbell makes the following excellent remarks: "This "(says he) was the very source of the blindness of the Jews "in our Saviour's time. They searched the Scriptures very "assiduously, but in the disposition they entertained they "would never believe what the sacred volume testifies of "Christ. The reason is obvious, their great rule of inter-"pretation was the analogy of faith; or, in other words, the "system of the Phariseean scribes, the devotion then in "vogue, and in the profound veneration of which they had "been educated."—Campbell's Translation of the Gospel, vol. 1.

Properly to understand the Gospel, we must put ourselves as much as possible in the position of the original hearers or readers of the sacred word. But, it is manifest that this cannot be done without an exercised and critical knowledge of the languages in which they were originally written. Now,

" the important labours of the Biblical Critic," says a learned
" author already cited, " are directed to this very purpose, of
" putting the modern reader (so far as possible,) into the posi-
" tion of the ancient reader. Doctrinal interpretation should
" not, cannot, commence until the language, with all its essen-
" tial properties, is brought under our familiar cognizance. If
" there be any usage of words, any principle of construction,
" any special sense of terms, the knowledge of which is impor-
" tant to an exact grammatical rendering of the sacred text, the
" utmost diligence should be employed in fixing beyond doubt
" the rule with its exceptions. When erudition has done its
" utmost on such occasions, it has done nothing more than
" bring our modern mind into contact with the mind of the
" writer."—Natural History of Fanaticism.

It is known to more than one whom I this day address, that these sentiments have long been mine, although I could not express them in such elegant and forcible language as this learned and most acute author has done. And give me leave earnestly to entreat Students of Theology, and my younger brethren in the Ministry, to endeavour to acquire an accurate knowledge of at least the original language of the New Testament, and if they should have opportunity, to add to that some acquaintance with the Hebrew, the advantage and pleasure which they would derive from this study would soon more than compensate for the trouble and irksomeness of the acquisition.

There is one doctrine of a very important nature, upon which the Church of England is generally thought to differ from that of the establishment of the Sister Kingdom, viz. the doctrine of Election and Predestination. This is usually called Calvinism, although it was taught by St. Augustine many centuries ago, and is said to have been maintained in all its rigour by some of the Roman Schoolmen previous to the Reformation. It is however remarkable, that the Greek Commentators on the New Testament, who most certainly must have known the import of the original terms made use of by Saint Paul, and the other inspired writers, much better than can be done by the most accomplished scholars of modern times, make no mention of this doctrine. Calvin, the great restorer of the doctrine in modern times, was, says Hooker, " the wisest and " most learned man that ever belonged to the reformed Church " of France." The preface to his Institutes, addressed to Francis I. as an apology for the Reformers, has attracted the admiration of succeeding ages. The whole of his Institutes

are well worth attentive perusal, for the deep learning, knowledge of Scripture, and fervent piety displayed in them. It is however much to be lamented, that the language he uses towards his antagonists, and those who differ from him in opinion, is acrimonious, and violent in the extreme, and the appellations which he bestows upon his adversaries, exceedingly vulgar and coarse, savouring but little of the mild and meek spirit which the Apostle has told us in the sight of God is of great price. But perhaps this is to be imputed rather to the times than to the temper of the man. The third book of the Institutes contains his system, drawn up in a clear and methodical manner, well worth the attention of all who are studying this deep and intricate subject. The system of Calvin was opposed by James Van Hermen, or, as he is usually called, Arminius, Professor of Divinity in the University of Leyden. Several persons in Holland of the greatest learning and talent, espoused the same doctrines. Arminius met with the warmest opposition from Gomar, his own colleague, and from the principal Professors in the Dutch Seminaries of learning. Maurice, Prince of Orange, wishing to put an end to these deplorable disputes, which were often attended with civil broils, referred the matter to the decision of the Church assembled in a general Synod at Dordrecht, or Dort, in the year 1618. This Synod was attended by the most eminent Divines of the United Provinces, by deputies from the Churches of England, Scotland, Switzerland, Bremen, Hess and the Palatinate. By the sentence of these Judges the Arminians lost their cause, and were declared corruptors of the true doctrine. —Moshiem. "The leaders of the vanquished Arminians "(says the same learned Historian,) were eminently distin- "guished by their eloquence, sagacity and learning, and being "highly exasperated by the injurious and oppressive treat- "ment they met with in consequence of their condemnation, "they defended themselves and attacked their adversaries with "such spirit and vigour, and also with such dexterity and "eloquence that multitudes were persuaded of the justice of "their cause. The Arminian Doctrine was first digested into a regular system, and embellished with the charms of a masculine eloquence by Episcopius, the most learned of all those usually termed remonstrants, and the Thelogical Student who has the opportunity will do well, after the perusal of the 3d Book of Calvin's Institutes, carefully to read Episcopius's chapter upon free will, and his answer to some of his opponents, particularly

to a learned Scotchman who maintained high Calvinistical opinions.—Responsio Ad Cameronem. But as these works are not very easily procured, the Student will find these respective opinions clearly stated, and ably supported on the one side by Gill in his Body of Divinity, and on the other by Whitby, on what are usually called the five points. These two learned and candid writers have, in my opinion, nearly exhausted the subject. Much information may also be obtained from the Bishop of Lincoln's Refutation of Calvinism on the one hand, and Scott's Force of Truth on the other. Bishop Burnet, on the 17th article, hath stated the arguments on both sides with great ability and candour, as has Dr. Hay Norrisian, Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge. The exposition of the latter, I consider as a perfect model of the manner in which a controverted subject should be handled. The duty of a Theological Professor is to direct the Student to these and similar sources of information, and earnestly to impress upon him the indispensable necessity of reasoning and thinking for himself on all subjects of controversy, in order to prevent him from forming opinions at random. The subject of Church Government has likewise unfortunately divided the Protestant world, and excited controversies which have often been carried on with but too much acrimony by the respective disputants. In every controversy, truth and not victory, ought to be aimed at. The attention of the Student must be directed to the purest sources of information,—these sources are Scripture and primitive Antiquity. The importance of the enquiry is thus suggested by the judicious Hooker. "Whether (says he) as we are to believe forever the Articles "of Evangelical Devotion, so the precepts of discipline we are "not in the like sort bound for ever to maintain?" Many in the present day seem to think, that no form of Church government has a preference over another, and that it is a matter of but little consequence to what denomination of Christians they join themselves, provided that, according to their phraseology, the Gospel of Christ be preached. But surely, if Christ gave a commission to his Apostles, by virtue of which they and their successors became governors of His Church, that commission consequently conveyed an investitute of authority from the only fountain from which power in spiritual matters can possibly be derived. "As my Father sent me (says Christ to his Apos"tles,) so send I you." To ascertain therefore who are invested with this authority, the Scriptures of the New Testa-

ment must be diligently and critically searched, particularly the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and in doing this we must lay aside, as much as possible, the notions which from prejudice we may have been accustomed to apply to the words Bishop, Presbeter, and Deacon, and to endeavour to ascertain if possible the ideas which the inspired writers annexed to these terms.—The next source is the witness of the primitive Fathers. It is the fashion of many in modern times, to depreciate the authority of the Fathers, to consider their witness either as spurious, or their reasonings so weak as to be entitled to no weight. It must certainly be confessed that some of them reasoned very ill, and that others, from the Schools of Heathen Philosophy in which they had studied previous to their conversion, brought into the Church, doctrines by which the pure Faith of Christ was greatly corrupted. But surely, if they were men of common sense, they must have known what was the form of Church government under which they lived, and if they were possessed of ordinary integrity, they would not wilfully have misrepresented it. As to the genuineness of their testimony, it may be dangerous to question this in so far as regards matters of importance, as upon the validity of which we establish Infant Baptism. For certainly there is no direct command given in the New Testament for the Baptism of Infants, although there are the strongest proofs to be drawn from analogy and inference, and the testimony of the ancient Fathers puts the point beyond dispute. The change of the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Lord's Day depends upon the same evidence, for neither our Lord nor His Apostles gave any express commandment on the matter. But what is of still greater moment, the genuineness of the Canon of Scripture must be proved from the same testimony. This has been shewn at great length by Lardner, in his Credibility, and Jones on the Canon, and admirably by Paley in the 2d Volume of his Evidences; therefore to deny the genuineness of these writings may be very dangerous, as an Infidel of the least acuteness may say,—if you deny these writings to be genuine in one respect, you invalidate their authority in all. To the writings of the Fathers, then, especially to those of the first three centuries, an appeal must be made whether Episcopacy be or be not of Apostolical institution. This is a subject upon which I should have no hesitation whatever in directing the Student to examine and think for himself, to scrutinize the evidence with a keen and logical eye and to take

nothing upon trust. In the beautiful language of Sir John Herschel, on another subject,—tampering neither with the honesty of the testimony, nor the honesty of his own mind. Let him read for instance, if he can procure it, the Book of the learned Blondel, who was employed by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, to bring forward all that could be adduced in favour of the Presbyterian form of Church government. After this let him peruse Hammond's dissertation against Blondel; or if he cannot have access to these, there may be substituted for them, Lord King on the Primitive Church, and Slater's Original Draught, Dr. Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, and Bishop Skinner's Primitive Truth and Order.

To conclude.—With respect to the Petitions given in to the General Assembly of the Province, praying for an alteration in the Charter of this College, and in the constitution of the Madras Board, I shall say nothing; the Legislature will deal with them as in their wisdom they may seem fit; it would be highly unbecoming in us to agitate in the matter. If the Doctrine, the Order or the Discipline of this Church be attacked, the Church must look to us as her Ministers for her defence. But let us in no case whatever be the aggressors. Let us leave all in the unmolested possession of that unquestionable right of free enquiry which belongs to every rational being. But if ever we should be dragged into controversy let us enter into it with that spirit which actuated the immortal Hooker, when he said, the day will come when three words spoken with meekness and charity will avail more than three thousand volumes composed with disdainful sharpness of wit; and let us follow a still brighter example, viz. that of our Blessed Saviour, who upon all occasions bore evidence to the truth, and who, before Pontius Pilate, witnessed a good confession, yet who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, &c. Let us all be cordially united among ourselves, avoiding all party and private feeling, have but one end in view—the Glory of God and the increase of His Church. That Church, founded upon the rock of ages, against which the gates of Hell shall not finally prevail, but which in God's good time shall go forth, terrible as an army with banners, conquering and to conquer.